

35th INTERNATIONAL COTTON CONFERENCE BREMEN 2021



INTRO SPEECH

Session:

Panel Discussion: Circular Economy (C5)

Presentation Title:

Intro speech

Speaker:

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Presentations are available on the conference archive:

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Conference Organization

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Intro Bremen Cotton Conference
Kjersti Kviseth 2025design Norway
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About me

Good afternoon everyone . I am Kjersti. Kviseth. A farmers daughter from the middle of Norway or Nowhere, as we like to say. Up here in Trondheim the snow is still colouring the surroundings white as cotton, and I can go skiing in my red cotton anourak. Still, the daylight hours promise us the spring is approaching.

I have been circulating and lifecycling for 25 years. In My job as product designer I fell in love with the possibility to be the first sustainability manager in one of the main office seating companies in Europe,. we were early adopters and pioneers in circular design. I introduced both the Natural Step and Cradle to Cradle framework in a time of environmental consciousness that soon after lost traction in financial down times. This company still work with the circular design principles from back then, and now experience great success due to the general rise of circular economy.

Today I guide fashion and outdoor, industries and organisations in circular design and strategies, reuse and recycling, teach design students.

I do farm a tiny bit as well, transforming a conventional garden into permaculture and no-till growing. it is all about soil.

My take on CE

There is no cotton growing in Norway. In fact I have never seen a cotton field up close. I wish one day to be able to visit a cotton farm. My knowledge of cotton is limited.

What we do have in Norway are sheep. And wool. I know a lot about that. I have been working with the Norwegian, as well as the global wool industry, for many years to promote and support wool as the great, sustainable and circular fibre it is.

I do see cotton and wool as best friends or relatives in many ways. In my language, as in German, cotton is called "TreeWool". Both fibres grow in nature, are renewable and biodegradable, sequester carbon and make up wonderful textiles for different purposes. In the beginning there was only what nature gave us.

I am a wool nerd, I use wool all year round for all purposes. BUT I do love my cotton textiles too. The freshness towards the skin, The smell of clean bed sheets after drying outdoor on the line, or the towel making me dry after washing my hands for the who knows many times today.

I have picked up one of my grandmas old cotton handkerchiefs, with embroidered flowers and perfectly ironed, smelling lavender from an old ladies drawer... I think I might need it..

Tomorrow a funeral ceremony for my brother is held, he died of cancer last week, and is now on his journey onwards to a transition into new life. As I believe it to be.

This made me cancel my original planned circular economy business kind of talk.

In the Tibetan Book of the dead, there is the Bardo, the state between one life and the next. It is crucial to be prepared for the death and the transitioning into a next life. Just as we prepare for life during 9 months in our mothers body. The art of living, and the art of dyeing are two sides of the same coin. This is what circular economy is about. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. It applies to all life on earth. Transitioning from 1 state to another.

Think of the seedlings who need a stay in the ground during winter to come to life and sprout in spring. Then returning to earth in a composting process .

This is how nature circulates.

The circular economy is not created to be of service only to industry. It is a wake up call for all humans, to remember who we are.

My brother was a small scale farmer, with conventional crops, using fertilizers and pesticides like everyone else. We grew up with round-up. His cancer is suspected to be related to the pesticide use, as a few other farmers suffered the same.

I have been thinking about this a lot this week. I have been thinking of La Rhea Pepper and her founding of Textile Exchange based on the similar backgrounds. I have been thinking about cotton farmers who I never have met, -just read about or seen on documentaries- who suffer the same.

My conclusion is clear, the excess use of synthetic chemicals is the main challenge for cotton in a circular economy (As for agriculture and the textile industry in general.)

Just add dyestuff, finishings and other chemicals to the list and your cocktail is ready.

Design out waste and pollution is One main pillar of the circular economy as outlined by Pamela. Without clean materials, circular systems are not possible, we will continue to spread toxins in virgin and recycled materials, as unknown chemical cocktails.. **Shit in is Shit out.**

The industry strives for perfectly closed loops and fibre to fibre recycling. And focusing upon job creations in an ever growing waste and recycling sector. It is a good thing but not enough. AND often used as an excuse to produce and sell more stuff that we do not need

A circular system is one that circulates resources to nurture something new, sometimes it goes out of the loop and something new enters, shifting and shaping.

Only a few blossoms from the famous cherry tree in the Cradle to Cradle paradigm become new cherry trees. Most go back to earth to nurture other processes. It circulates.

This is another main challenge; to widen our scope and understanding of what circularity means in a holistic picture. It is Not just for corporate businesses, industry and manufacturing systems.

For me the Design aspect of systems and products is core to enable circular economy. Designing Systems and products that include people and planet, support communities and all living beings.

Which leads me to another main pillar for me, to celebrate diversity in all aspects of the term. It derives from the C2C. One size does not fit all, both people and value come in many forms. we must caring for the earth and the people who live far away from us, in the same way we care for our garden and our close beloved ones.

Talking about product design, I certainly have some improvement ideas to how we leave this life in my part of the world. We wrap our deads in their favourite outdoor GoreTex pants, a cotton poly shirt, in a polyester lined coffin. We do not easily return to earth as our ashes are kept in slowly degrading boxes.

The circular economy is a perfect platform for all natural fibres - the perfect revenge of the nerds, in a time with a war of the fibres going on.

Ongoing policy work in the EU show that we need to stand up to fight rigid industry policies being made that unfavour natural fibres and see Circular Economy as mainly an industrial business framework.

Circular Economy is a win for biodegradables, renewables and regenerative materials. So It is time to speak up loud about all the positive and circular attributes of the naturals. Another challenge we face.

We came to this planet with this knowledge of circularity. It is time to wake up. Let us remember who we are.

Thank you